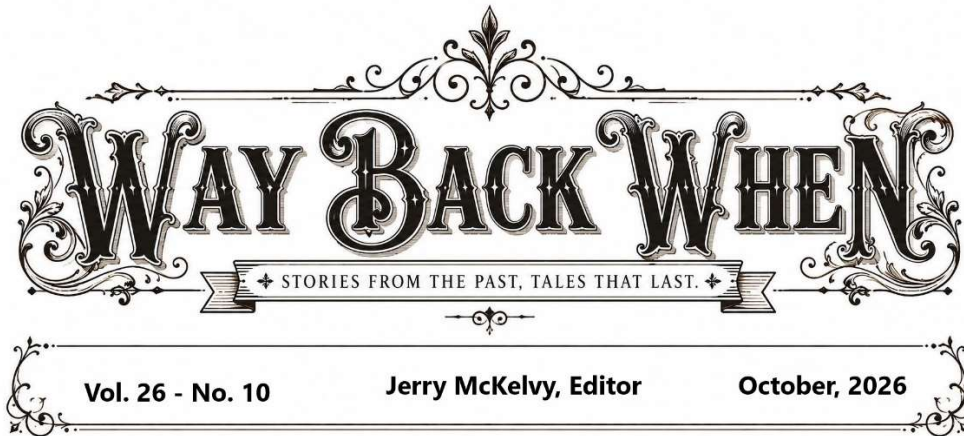




Comments, Questions, Suggestions – Email sandman43@att.net

MY GREAT AUNT—LAURA BELLE KIRK

Everyone probably had people in their lives who were special to them. One such person in my life was my great aunt, Laura Belle Kirk. She helped raise me when I was a kid. She never married and lived alone in an old house in Bluff City. I visited her often in her home and she sometimes stayed at our house for several days at a time.

She lived a simple life. She never drove a car and never owned a television set. I remember her feather bed in her home and a large radio in the front room. She had a hump-backed trunk full of all kinds of interesting things in one of the bedrooms. There was a swing on her front porch where we sat in the summer because it was cooler there. I wish now that I had asked her more questions while she was alive.

Her parents were Jasper and Nancy Kirk and their home was located on what is now known as County Rd. 47, but is shown on old maps as Kirk Rd. Jasper died in 1930 and Nancy in 1938. They had 14 children with nine surviving at the time of Jasper's death.

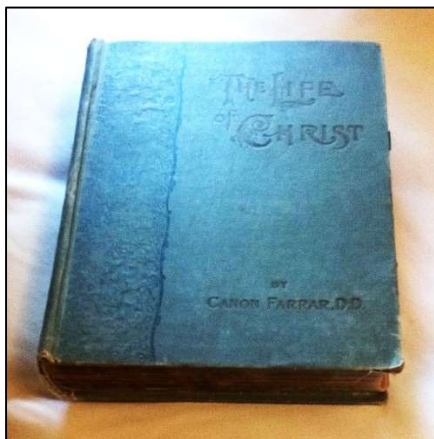


Nancy Ann Honea Kirk

My great grandmother, Nancy Ann Honea Kirk

I found a copy of Nancy Kirk's will which lists many household items she left to my great aunt, Laura Kirk. Most wills do not get this specific. She probably gave all this to Laura because she was not married and had nobody to provide for her. Listed in the will are four bowls. Aunt Laura gave me a large serving bowl about 60 years ago which I believe could have been one of the bowls listed in the will. I have kept it in a dresser drawer to protect it. And the feather bed I once slept on is probably the one mentioned in the will.

...all of my property, to be divided equally to each as named above, or their heirs; And Laura Belle Kirk all the money (balance) I may have on hand, and also the following articles, Namely:-
 1 China Ware Butter Dish, 1 Yellow Top Lamp, 3 Enamel Ware Boilers, 1 Frying Pan, 1 1/2 Gal Stone Jar with lid, 1 Rolling Pin, 1 Stove Pan, 2 prs Scissors, 2 Smoothing Irons, 1 large Framed Picture, All Lard and Syr Buckets and cans, All the Fruit and Fruit Jars, 4 Small Enamel Ware Pudding Pans, 4 Tin Cake Pans, 5 Pie Plates, 1 White Enamel Ware Water Bucket, 2 Enamel Ware Dish Pans, 1 Cream Pitcher, 1 Salt Box, 1 White Water Pitcher, 3 Aluminum Sauce Pans, 1 Aluminum Roaster, 4 1gal Jars, 1 Big White Stone Jar, 1 3gal White Churn, 6 Tablespoons, 2 Stone Ware Bowls, 50 Jelly Glasses, 4 Bowls, 2 Cake Plates, 1 Cake Stand, 1 Butter Dish, 1 Fruit Stand, 7 Dinner Plates, 6 Cups, 6 Saucers, All the Hand Towels, 1 White Bedspread, 5 prs Pillow Cases, 16 Bed Sheets, 1 Hand Made Chest, 1 Rocking Chair, 1 Mattress (Newest), 1 Feather Bed, 4 Feather Pillows, 1 Dresser, 1 Folding Cot, 2 Trunks with all their contents, and 14 Quilts, to be paid or delivered to her as soon after my decease, but within one year, as conveniently may be done, and if any of the above named articles should not be on hand at my decease it shall not operate to invalidate the remainder of this my last Will and Testament.



She also gave me a hymn book called Heavenly Highway Hymns with her initials inside the cover and a large book of over 600 pages originally published in 1874 called The Life of Christ with the inscription "Presented to Jerry from Aunt Laura - January 27, 1959.

Aunt Laura died in 1966 at the age of 81. She was buried at Ebenezer Cemetery along with her parents and many other relatives. After her death, I remembered that we didn't even have a picture of her after she was grown. Then one day, a cousin of mine sent me this picture of Aunt Laura which I was glad to get. I also took this picture of her old home in Bluff City as it looked in 1970, four years after her death. It was located on a sandy hill on the north side of Hwy. 387 (the road to the state park).



Laura Kirk



Laura Kirk home in Bluff City (1970)

MEMORIES FROM BLUFF CITY SCHOOL

It was the fall of 1929. Kids from Bluff City and the surrounding area were attending school in the new brick school building following consolidation of several small schools into the Bluff City district. There were 170 students and eight teachers in 1929. The new \$12,000 school was dedicated by Gov. Harvey Parnell in a special ceremony which included a delegation from Camden and music provided by the Camden Boys Band

The school had the usual organizations like the PTA, the FFA, an agri. department and a home economics class. There were two literary societies called the Hubs and the Spartans. The school competed with other schools in basketball. The school even had a ten-acre school forest, one of the first in the state, with the students doing the planting.

Everything was progressing nicely at the school until January, 1945 when the school building was completely destroyed by a fire. This was a terrible blow to the community and caused a disruption of the usual routine for the students attending at that time.

I contacted a cousin of mine, Betty Kirk Thomas, who was attending school at the time of the fire. She started school at Bluff City in 1944 in the fourth grade. She says that following the fire, the younger grades went to school in the Church of Christ building and the high school students in the Baptist church (a different building from the present one). The school had a home for the use of the school principal. The principal at that time was Mr. Joe Meador. Since he had his own home, the principal's home at the school was being rented out. When that home became vacant, some desks were brought in and the

grade school was moved into that house. Betty remembers the desks were shoved against the wall. If the student sitting against the wall needed to get up, two other students had to get up to let them out.



West side of new school building—Main entrance with flag pole

Finally, the school had been rebuilt at the same location and students were once more back in class together. Betty mentioned three teachers--Mr. Hillman May who was principal, Mrs. Lelia Barlow, and Mrs. Maude Loe. Mrs. Loe taught fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Mrs. Barlow taught math and English. Mr. May, the principal, taught social studies and kept the study hall for the high school kids.



Mr. May Mrs. Barlow Mrs. Loe

Betty had this to say about two of her teachers. She says "Mrs. Lelia Barlow was one terrific teacher--she had little "tricks" that she taught us about math and checking your work that made it fun (at least for me). Mrs. Loe was a good teacher. I remember she would go to the wholesaler in Prescott and buy tablets, pencils, and notebook paper. When we ran out, she would sell it to us and use the profits to buy books for us to read. I remember Alice Ann Starnes and I loved Nancy Drew books. We would consult before we would buy a new one to be sure it was one we hadn't read. We would try to influence Mrs. Loe to buy those when she bought books. She insisted that the boys needed books, too. As a result, I learned a lot about Red Ryder! I remember building a log cabin in her class and making a terrarium. She was very creative with what she had or could find. I certainly respected her."

In 1948, Betty was in the eighth grade. She said the school board announced that the Bluff City high school would no longer be accredited for the coming school year, but the grade school would continue at Bluff City. It was decided that the high school students

would go to Chidester and they did for one year. Some students enrolled at the Cale school. Several students from the Gum Grove and Rocky Hill communities would meet the Cale school bus at the bottom of the hill on the road leading to Rocky Hill. Betty said her parents enrolled her at Cale for the ninth grade.

Betty says that when she first started to school at Bluff City, one of the classrooms was used as a lunch room. She remembers carrying her lunch in a blue metal lunch box with a small thermos bottle. Her mother would pack a snack for her to eat on the way home. After the new building was completed, a building was moved to the north end of the school building and was used as a lunch room.

The school started a hot lunch program in 1940, the first in the county, which was the model for the state. Vegetables were grown in the school garden under the leadership of A. P. Creech. One year, over 1750 jars of vegetables were canned under the direction of Miss Beulah Starnes. Jars were donated by the women of the community and a pie supper was held to raise money for the lids. Surplus vegetables were given to the needy.

The school had no indoor restrooms. The outdoor toilets were located in the pine trees north of the school building. Those pines had been planted by the students in the 1930s.

The water supply for the school was a well on the west side of the building. A small pump house was there and Betty says she thinks there were three “bubble” faucets that could be turned on to get a drink. An electric pump was installed at the well in 1938. The PTA made the down payment of \$15. Water was always a problem for many folks in Bluff City. Many residents hauled water in barrels from the artesian well near White Oak Creek or from a couple of nearby springs. In 1979, the church hired a well driller to drill a four-inch well on the north side of the building, but they did not find enough water to support a well.

The main door to enter the school was on the west side of the building by the auditorium. The back door by the stage was used to go the lunch room and to go to “those horrible toilets” as Betty describes them.

Betty says that just before James Tomlin entered the military service, Betty and Bennie Hildebrand got their dad’s flat-bed truck and picked up all the kids in Bluff City and then went around by Gum Grove and Rocky Hill picking up more kids. She joined them and they ended up at Houston Delaney’s old mill site near Betty’s house where they had a wiener roast and a party. This was sort of the last hurrah for the older Bluff City school kids.

Thanks to Betty Kirk Thomas for sharing her memories of the Bluff City school. I started to school at Bluff City in the fall of 1949 and went there for the first and second grades. Mrs. Loe was my teacher for my first three grades—two years at Bluff City and third grade at Prescott. I don’t remember much about my first and second grades at Bluff City. I do still have my old report cards and they show that I did satisfactory work and I even got an outstanding grade in reading and spelling in the second grade.

The one event that is hard to forget happened in 1950 when Mrs. Maggie Meador, a teacher at the school, was killed in an explosion when she lit the butane stove in her classroom. Our bus arrived at the school shortly after that happened. Before she died, she said she was blown against the ceiling when she struck a match to light the heater. She was alone in the building at the time. A 15-year-old boy, a former student of Mrs. Meador, admitted that he turned the heater jets on the night before. After an investigation, he was later sent to the Boy's Industrial School at Pine Bluff.

The Bluff City school consolidated with Prescott in the fall of 1951. This consolidation left Bluff City with a nearly new school building standing vacant. The members of the Church of Christ decided to purchase the building from the Prescott school district. After some remodeling, the church was dedicated August 24, 1958. The congregation still meets in the building today.



Bluff City Church of Christ (formerly the Bluff City school)

A TRAGIC EVENT FROM 1954

We have grown accustomed to hearing about murders in the news just about every day in which innocent people are killed. Acts of violence are nothing new. Disputes within families can sometimes lead to violence and police know that a call about a domestic dispute can be very dangerous for them as they respond.

Way back in March of 1954, such an incident happened about a quarter of a mile from our house. My grandfather, Charlie Henry and his wife, Minnie, lived a short distance from us and a little further down the road was a small wooden house where an African-American family lived (the Purifoyes).

Dextie Gulley, age 24, and his wife, Guartha Mae, age 16, had a three-week-old daughter and were staying at her parent's home following the birth of the child. They had recently had some sort of argument and Guartha Mae's parents had taken her side of the argument. The Purifoy home was very small so it was quite crowded at that time with nine people in the house.

About three o'clock in the morning on March 26, 1954, the sound of gunshots disturbed the normally peaceful neighborhood. Dextie Gulley entered the Purifoy home armed with a .22 caliber rifle and begin shooting as the Purifoy family slept. He fired a total of eleven shots with eight of them finding a target. Killed were his father-in-law, Will Buchanan "Buck" Purifoy (53), Purifoy's 14-year-old daughter named Charla Mae Purifoy, and his ten-year-old son named Shelton Purifoy. Three others were wounded—Dextie's wife, Guartha Mae (age 16), was hit in the back and hip and two of her brothers were wounded. R. W. (Jack) Purifoy (age 20) had a minor shoulder wound. W. R. Purifoy (age 22) was hit in the shoulder and head and was taken to the Camden hospital in critical condition.

Only one member of the Purifoy family managed to escape. Buck's wife, Esther, ran from the house when the shooting started and went to my grandfather's house up the road for help. There were no phones available at that time, so my grandfather had to drive to the state forestry nursery about two miles away where he worked to call for help.

About an hour and a half after the shooting, Dextie Gulley's half-brother drove him to Prescott where he turned himself in to authorities and asked what his fine would be. He was placed in jail and the sheriff began his investigation. Gulley was sent to the state hospital for a mental health evaluation. The trial was held in Prescott and lasted two days before a packed courtroom. Most felt he should get the death penalty, but his sentence was life in prison. His lawyers said the sentence would be appealed.

I was ten years old at the time this happened. A few years after this incident, the Purifoy home was vacant and was burned down as a training exercise for the Bluff City Fire Department.

The three Purifoyes who were killed were buried at the Mt. Moriah Cemetery near White Oak Lake. I don't know anything about Dextie Gulley's prison record or if the case was appealed, but I did find on the find a grave web site that he died in 1997 at age 67 and was buried in a cemetery near Pine Bluff.

Incidents such as this happen every day across America. Many innocent lives are lost due to mental problems or just violent tempers that people can't control. This one was a little too close for comfort for our family.

Any time we get upset about something, we need to take some time to "cool off" and think of the consequences before doing something drastic. Thomas Jefferson once said if you get angry, you should count to ten, but if you are very angry, count to one hundred.

We see the results in this case of what can happen if a violent temper is not controlled. Three people including a 14-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy lost their lives and three more were injured. A young injured mother was left to raise her three-week-old baby while her husband spent the rest of his life in prison all because of how he reacted to a family disagreement.

Mr. Reading, My Reading Teacher – by Don Mathis

October 5 is set aside as World Teachers' Day, a time to honor educators around the globe. Don Mathis remembers one teacher who made a difference in his life.

One day Mr. Reading told us how to deal with a bully. "You stand up to him," he said. "If he hits you, hit him back."

A week or two later, the guy behind me kept thumping the back of my head. I told him to stop but every time Mr. Reading had his back turned, the guy would do it again.

So, remembering the lesson from the week before, I turned around and smacked the bully. It was a loud fleshy smack; the whole class heard it. The jerk was about to rain down punches on me but Mr. Reading broke it up.

The teacher asked why I did that and I told him his parable about bullies. He smiled at himself and resolved never to teach that lesson again.

But Mr. Reading (an apt name for an English teacher if there ever was one) taught many other lessons.

He had a speed-reading film projector, and every week he would increase the words per minute the text would flash by. Mr. Reading would have us diagram sentences so they made sense. He taught us about foreshadowing, symbolism, and other literary devices. I think his sixth-grade English class is where I learned to love to read. "The Lottery" (by Shirley Jackson) was an apt metaphor for the draft – which was looming just ahead. "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (by Ambrose Bierce) gave me a glimpse into the misfortunes of war.

I did not see the writing on the wall then, but six years later the draft introduced me to the realities of the Vietnam War. And I remembered Mr. Reading.

I learned as much about life in his class as I did about English composition. Thank you, Mr. Reading!

World Teachers' Day ***October 5***

